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ABSTRACT

Developments in distance education are addressed in four papers. In "A Practical Winery Experience," Malcolm Allen discusses Riverina College of Advanced Education's Bachelor of Applied Science (wine science) course, which is vocationally oriented, mainly enrolls students from the wine industry, and primarily uses correspondence study. It provides theoretical and practical knowledge of the basic sciences, wine science and technology, and wine appraisal. David Meacham's paper, "Development in External Studies," explains the role of the development section of the Division of External Studies at Riverina College, with attention to steps in approving new mail packages, and evaluation criteria. In "Student-Oriented Action," Edward Reid-Smith discusses the student services team that serves external studies students. Attention is directed to: specific student needs, the types of information students need, and the creation of facilitating systems. The last paper, "Feedback for Correspondence Students," by Robert Trevethan, discusses four main reasons for providing feedback materials to correspondence study students: breaking down the student's feeling of isolation, providing information about individual and group performance, and informing students about results obtained on a subject evaluation questionnaire. (SW)

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ACTION IN EXTERNAL STUDIES

by Staff of Riverina College

Division of External Studies
Riverina College of Advanced Education
Wagga Wagga NSW 2650

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In any organisation whose members are administratively and geographically scattered, there is a need to be aware of each others' ideas and actions in order to maintain a cohesiveness of purpose. This is particularly so in a complex body such as a college, where many aims and objectives must be harnessed within the goals of the institution.

This present pamphlet was suggested by the Head of the Division of External Studies, Dr Les Eastcott, as a means by which a few college staff could inform their colleagues about some actions in external studies currently taking place. No doubt others will follow. It so happens that two of the papers emanate from lecturers and two from staff of the Division itself. They are in no way intended to be learned papers in the accepted academic sense, but rather four people speaking to their colleagues in the institution.

We hope that they will serve to reinforce the feeling that every member of the staff of Riverina College shares concerns and experiences. The problems and solutions of each of us affect us all.

E. R-S

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A PRACTICAL WINERY EXPERIENCE

by Malcolm Allen

To an extent that is perhaps greater than that of any other commercial commodity in Australia, wine is a product of organisations with a tremendous diversity of size; from an individual producer who may fill bottles and append a signature to labels by hand, to multi-national companies operating technologically advanced plants that handle several million litres with only a handful of personnel. The diversity of wine itself encourages this. Between one producer and another, one vintage and another, one label and another, there are differences in taste and aroma that challenge the perceptiveness of the palate.

While the desire of many is that wine should be an inexpensive alcoholic beverage, ensuring that much is the product of mass-production methods and aggressive marketing policies that can only be accommodated by the larger companies; the search for individuality, the unusual, or the best in wine, even at the expense of price, ensures that small producers can compete effectively with large companies in the market place.

Regardless of the size of the organisation involved, wine production is a process that is more complex than first meets the eye. Although there was a time when wine would have been allowed to form naturally, with little attention; modern winemaking requires the obvious steps of juice fermentation and wine bottling to be supplemented by such operations as filtration, centrifugation, acidification, protein removal and yeast propagation.

Attention must be paid to the temperature, chemical composition and microbiological condition of the grapes, juice and wine, and throughout most of the production process it is necessary to rigorously avoid contact of juice or wine with air. This complexity of the production process requires those who are involved with it to have a sound knowledge of a wide range of practices and techniques. When the diversity of size of wine production facilities is also considered, it can be seen that the scope of equipment, techniques, and practices that are used in the wine industry is considerable.

There is an obvious requirement for graduates of a course that is directed towards the wine industry, and focussing upon the science and technology of wine-making, to have an adequate theoretical knowledge and practical experience of the range of equipment and techniques that may be encountered in the industry.

Role of the College Winery

At Riverina College of Advanced Education, the Bachelor of Applied Science (Wine Science) course is a vocationally oriented course that takes students almost exclusively from the wine industry, and overwhelmingly by the correspondence mode of study. It provides a theoretical and practical knowledge of the basic sciences, wine science and technology, and wine appraisal.

Of particular importance to the course, as a facility through which students can acquire practical knowledge and experience, is the College winery. With a capability to process about 200 tonnes of grapes each vintage, its size was chosen to be about the smallest that is both commercially viable and capable of using and demonstrating the equipment and techniques of much larger wineries. It is largely run on commercial

lines, with profitability as well as teaching in mind, so that the practices adopted in the winery, and encountered by the students, are closely related to those that are used by the wine industry.

Although a prior involvement with the wine industry is a requirement for correspondence enrolment in the Wine Science course, this involvement frequently provides the student with inadequate practical knowledge. In many instances experience is restricted to one facet of winemaking, to techniques that can be improved, or to a limited scale of operations. For some, experience is peripheral to the technical aspects of wine production, as in viticulture or wine marketing. Others may be commencing their own grapegrowing and winemaking operations, and may not have had the opportunity to acquire a satisfactory depth of experience. Through its involvement in the teaching of many of the subjects of the course, and the opportunity that it provides for students to participate in routine wine production activities, the College winery plays an important role in extending the practical knowledge and experience of students.

As a result of the extensive use of stainless steel storage facilities, refrigeration, inert gas, and hot water sterilisation, the winery is probably the best equipped in the country for its size. This situation allows the operating practices learnt by the students to incorporate most of the recent developments in wine production.

Role of Industrial Experience

Even with the knowledge and experience that may be gained through the College winery, a wider practical experience can be beneficial. Some practices carried out in the wine industry may not be the most enlightened, the most technically correct, or utilise

the most suitable equipment. However, experience of the industry that is gained on the cellar floor (particularly if it encompasses a number of different companies) has much to offer. It can provide experience of a more diverse range of equipment, techniques and practices than can be obtained through the College winery alone. A winery of a size appropriate to an educational institution can hardly afford a $100,000 centrifuge, let alone justify a $1,000,000 fully automatic 'bag in the box' wine cask filling line.

The industry can provide experience of the production of a range of wine types and qualities that is beyond the scope of the College winery at the present time, as is the case for sparkling wines and large scale production of bulk wine. Furthermore, the industry can provide experience of the organisation of a cellar floor workforce, and insight into the many compromises that are inevitable in commercial operations whenever wine quality has to be balanced against production costs and production rate, or when wine type, style and quality must be heavily oriented towards consumer demand. Such experience can be invaluable in contributing to the development of a broad industry perspective through which the student may gain a better appreciation of the relevance of the teaching of the course.

Accommodating Practical Experience within the Course

It has become recognised that practical winery experience in the Wine Science course can most readily be accommodated if it is dissected into two quite different components. The first of these is an instructional component that is taught at the College winery as part of the practical sessions of the Wine Production and Winery Engineering subjects in the

course. It utilises the range of equipment and processing techniques that are available at the College winery; it provides instruction in the correct preparation, operation, assembly and cleaning of winery equipment; and it indicates the most satisfactory way of performing certain processing operations. Obviously, some of the equipment and procedures of the wine industry are not available to the College winery and cannot be covered in this way, but the depth of the instruction and the range of equipment and procedures that can be covered provides a solid foundation in most of the important areas.

The second practical component focusses upon the range and diversity of the equipment, techniques, and practices of the wine industry. It is not instructional, but instead requires the student to receive a certain degree of first-hand exposure to winemaking in commercial situations. Some of this may be received through participation in winemaking activities at the College winery. However, experience elsewhere will be required for activities that are not carried out at this facility, and students are encouraged to experience as diverse a range of winemaking activities and facilities as possible.

For some correspondence students, a large proportion of the required experience is acquired before commencement of the course, through their involvement with the wine industry. For most students, the practice of taking up employment in the industry during vintage is able to meet most of the requirements. For all students, this exposure to commercial situations ensures that the knowledge acquired during the course can be placed in a broad commercial perspective. Although this type of experience has been required informally in the past, it is formally required as a subject - Winery Experience - from 1982.

The range of commercial winemaking activities that it is desirable for the students to have exposure to will be indicated. The particular equipment and practices encountered, the wine types and qualities handled, the size of organisation concerned, and the degree of involvement of the student will be recorded and monitored throughout the course. Feedback to the student, of those areas to which more attention should be paid, will be provided.

The diversity of the wine industry, like that of the wine it produces, cannot be ignored; for the foreseeable future it is here to stay. An equal diversity is to be found among opinions on the role of practical winery experience. To some, a competent practical training is of paramount importance; to others, it is something that the wine industry should provide after graduation. Out of the many expressions of opinion, the approach outlined above has developed as a means of realistically responding to the demands and difficulties of incorporating practical winery experience into the Wine Science course.

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DEVELOPMENT IN EXTERNAL STUDIES

by David Meacham

As I am responsible for the development section of the Division, I welcome this opportunity to clarify its role within the total operation.

In general terms our task is to develop instructional materials (mail packages) and to assist those who write them. We have always taken the view that the academic staff constitutes the major resource in the College and should be astutely cultivated with regard to the teaching function of materials sent to external students.

This view contrasts with that of many people involved in instructional design. It is currently fashionable to emphasise the mystique of producing sound materials and to regard the lecturer as some kind of deficiency system, who you can do things to and for, but rarely with. We are firmly convinced that the individuals involved in the process of innovation should receive at least as much attention as the product.

Given this philosophy it may be of interest to outline our activities in more concrete terms, but first let us consider the development team itself:

Name	Qualifications	Designation
Dave Meacham	BSc (Environmental Science) DipEd BA (Social Science) MA (Instructional Design)	Associate Head/ Senior Development Officer

Name	Qualifications	Designation
Debbie Evans	BSc (Geology) DipEd	Development Officer
Dave Roberts	BA (Earth Science) MEd (Educational Planning & Curriculum)	Development Officer
Bruce Wells	BA (Mathematics & History) LittB (Mathematics) MA Hons (Mathematics)	Development Officer
Megan Withey	BA (Fine Arts) GradDipEd	Assistant Development Officer
Dianna Barbour	DipTeach (Primary)	Assistant Development Officer
Mandy Collins		Assistant Development Officer

So you can see that between us all, there is a fair range of experience which enables us to, at the very least, read manuscripts as surrogate students. Apart from a few exceptions, if no-one in the Division can make sense of a set of learning materials, then the student has virtually no chance at all.

In operational terms we can trace the progress of a mail package thus:

1. Staff who are new (new to writing mail packages, writing new subjects, undertaking major revisions) are provided with advice based on the manual "Distance Education: The Design of Study Materials" (if you require one they are now available from the Division).

2. The manuscript is received by the Division, information about it is recorded and copyright documentation is completed.

3. The manuscript is read by the development officer allocated to its school of origin. Suggestions for a cover design and any other illustrations are sent to the graphics section. Information about residential schools, lecturers, exams etc. is checked for accuracy and laid out in a standard format in the subject outline. Major headings are identified and a table of contents constructed. Minor headings are identified and a choice of typeface and layout is made.

4. Consideration is given to the teaching function of the materials, and suggestions are made regarding such matters as:

   i. is the material sufficiently stimulating?

   ii. are the desired outcomes being clearly communicated?

   iii. is the material clearly structured?

   iv. is there enough guidance about how to work through the materials?

   v. are self-testing exercises or other devices to promote active learning appropriate?

vi. have the students any way of checking whether they understand the material?

vii. do the students have any opportunities to use the knowledge they are accumulating, and apply it to relevent situations?

viii. is the assessment procedure valid with respect to the content?

ix. is there a mechanism for finding out what the students think of your materials and teaching?

Advice in the above areas can be given before, after or during the writing of the material.

5. The use of non-print media is considered. If there is a prima facie case for using such media as video tape, audio tape, photographic slides, or material published elsewhere, the lecturer's needs will be conveyed to Educational Services, who will make appropriate arrangements for production.

This completes the developmental part of the operation and the material is then typed, proofed, corrected and sent to the printery. It is then returned to External Studies for packaging and distribution.

Due largely to fluctuations in staffing levels, in the early part of 1982 we were unable to offer as comprehensive a range of assistance as we would have wished. However, we are now in a situation where we are able to renew our emphasis on the quality of the College's external teaching materials. Currently we are examining the problem of cost effectiveness.

This is a multi-dimensional problem which can in part be tackled by using photo-reduction techniques. For

some subjects we can reduce the typed manuscript by 20% with a corresponding saving on printing and postage. However, greater savings could be made if more attention was paid to writing study guides for appropriate texts rather than writing what are in effect, new textbooks.

We are fully aware of the problems of both suitability and readibility of texts, but are also aware that some academic staff see it as their duty to provide students with original material, even when there are acceptable commercially-produced alternatives. If there are acceptable published alternatives, then the lecturer is freed to pay more attention to the problem of actually teaching correspondence students rather than merely providing them with content. In this context study guides would focus on complementing published texts in a way which makes them appropriate for a particular group of students undertaking a specific course of study.

Such study guides should:

(a) take less time to write than content-oriented materials

(b) be smaller and result in postal and printing economies

(c) result in more effective learning.

In addition we are considering using audio tapes for study guides. This results in certain economies, but because of problems of referring to material on a tape, it must be supplemented by a subject outline which gives all vital organisational information to the student.

Having looked at the changes in our materials over the past few years, and noted comments by students,

visitors from other Colleges and the Higher Education Board, there is no doubt that significant advances have been made.

However, our external teaching could be more effective if more attention was paid to some of the following points, which have emerged from actual cases.

1. Students are confused about the goals of subjects.

2. Assessment procedures are not clear to the student.

3. There are too few self-testing exercises so students can judge their own progress.

4. Students are not satisfied with the speed of return or the length of comment on their assignments.

5. Residential schools are not being used to their best advantage.

6. We don't really know how students view the effectiveness of our teaching materials.

These problems obviously do not occur in the majority of subjects, but our task is to try to assist in the identification and elimination of such problems.

Now we are going in for longer production runs, it is even more important that we produce as effective teaching materials as possible within our budgetary constraints. So we look forward to working together with all appropriate members of the College to achieve this aim.

STUDENT-ORIENTED ACTION

by Edward Reid-Smith

Of course, staff at Riverina College have always been concerned to help students. Lecturers write comments on assignments, answer points in letters, and talk with individual people at residential schools. Staff of the Registrar's office assist students to register, enrol, and vary enrolment to suit their particular circumstances. The various sections of the Bursar's office are organised to ensure that payment of fees, provision of meals and accommodation, all proceed as smoothly as possible. The campus medical service, the chaplains, the College counsellor and the students' union all provide services aimed at the well-being of those who study with us.

What then is the point of developing a student services team, as the Division of External Studies has been doing over the past year or so? What action has been initiated, and in what ways is the team working for the people who make up the majority portion of our legal entity?

The idea of a team is itself a developmental concept, born of an increasing awareness that students' problems must not only be solved but, wherever possible, anticipated. To an extent the whole of the staff of the Division is itself a team, but the need to ensure that special attention is paid to particular identified areas has called for an infrastructure which allows sub-groups of interlocking membership to concentrate on pressing tasks. The student services team is such a student-oriented sub-group in a service-oriented Division.

Like many sub-groups in any organisation, this team has grown from existing staff engaged in cognate work. Its initial tasks may be seen as to:

(a) identify areas of external students' non-academic needs related to their functioning as students

(b) assist external students' decision-making by providing information which is both pertinent and free from "noise"

(c) set up study and assessment systems in accordance with academic requirements, which will facilitate students' continued enrolment.

As a viable enterprise both its objectives and its methodologies will change as new service priorities are perceived.

Students' Needs

In order to carry out the first task it must of course work very closely with other sub-groups within the Division, as well as within the College as a whole. For example, the restriction to non-academic needs carries with it a responsibility to ensure that academic needs are referred to appropriate members of the College staff. Some of the main current areas relate to:

- feelings of isolation
- feelings of inadequacy
- uncertainty as to existence of sources of help and advice
- difficulties in obtaining learning materials from various sources

- family and other problems making study difficult or attendance at residential schools impossible.

It will be apparent that in many cases the team acts as a focal point for students, and as a switchboard to provision of existing services which the student has not already contacted. Sue Bain, our Student Liaison Officer, must be one of the best-known people to our external students.

Information for Students

The second task undertaken by the team - information for decision-making - occurs in four ways: by publication, in response to letters, answering telephone calls, and seminars for students. Some of the areas currently being developed are:

- whether and when to enrol externally
- whether to withdraw or take leave
- whether to reduce or increase study
- how to use the College's system effectively.

Some of these have been the subject of general informative publications for some time, but are being improved (e.g. the "External Students Guide"). Others (such as the "Welcome to Study" workbooks for newly-enrolled students) are new services resulting from research and experience. The purpose is to encourage students to plan their proposed studies according to their individual circumstances as far as College requirements allow, and on the basis of whatever information is available. If the information is personal then the student is encouraged to investigate his/her own circumstances carefully. If the information is institutional then the College should

provide it at the appropriate time, and it becomes a duty for the team to ascertain the various key times.

The provision of opportunities for face-to-face contact between new students and College staff by means of one-day seminars is a new development in 1982. The initial ones, held experimentally in Wagga Wagga, Griffith and Albury, were designed not only to present the "human face" of Riverina CAE, but to familiarise students in advance of study with College facilities, expectations and procedures. These initial welcoming seminars allowed new external students to meet some of the people and services provided for them: from the Division of External Studies, from the Students' Union, from the academic staff, and from the Library.

Personally, I feel that we should develop these one-day get-togethers by holding them throughout New South Wales (and in 1983 particularly in the Sydney metropolitan area), allowing more people to share this informative and social experience. I believe too that over the next few years we should also offer a range of these personal-interaction days throughout the academic year (and during vacations), to deal with the essentials of life as mature-age external students. Attendance would be voluntary, so that those in most need would be more likely to participate in seminars and workshops.

Assessment and Study Facilities

The team's third task concerns creating facilitating-systems. A current priority is the design and management of an examinations system to cater for the increasing number of students, and for the increasing number of subjects which are introducing a formal examination as part of the assessment procedure. The phases of this task are to:

- analyse the existing system and determine what it should be doing to satisfy user requirements
- design a system to meet these requirements
- implement the system (initially manually but later using computer capabilities).

The team has been busy during the past few months in obtaining the co-operation of some fifty or more institutions to allow Riverina College to hold examinations on their premises. The purpose of formalising the holding of examinations is two-fold. Firstly, it removes a possible source of criticism by those who see individual examination supervision as open to abuse (although there is no evidence that this has been a problem at this College). Secondly, and more importantly from the team's point of view, it is a service to students in that, the organisation of supervision is now more often undertaken by the College and ceases to be a problem for the student. Benefits are also expected to result from the examination centres' receipt and despatch of papers and scripts in bulk, instead of the present thousands of transactions on an individual basis.

Nevertheless the new examinations system will be time-consuming for the team's staff, though it is believed that early computerisation of the system will assist greatly. There will still be many students living more than seventy kilometres from an official examinations centre, for whom individual schemes will have to be organised. This is one of the consequences that a distance education institution has to accept in a country such as Australia, where the population is divided between quite densely inhabited coastal areas and the sparsely settled areas inland.

In addition to the assessment system (of which the examinations centres are only a part), the team is

applying knowledge gained in its research investigations to assist students in their study. The first areas of action are residential schools and study groups. These are quite different for students in that the former is a compulsory and localised feature of lecturer-imposed content and method, whereas the latter is a voluntary and dispersed undertaking of student-directed initiation. Nevertheless these two features do have links and should form parts of an integrated programme of study. It is felt that it is the College's general responsibility (and more particularly that of the team itself) to encourage students to use these aids to learning and indicate their usage.

Assistance to students is a product of investigation into the phenomenon of student withdrawal from or persistence in their courses of study. It is a feature of College service where close co-operation between students, academic staff and the Division of External Studies is particularly important. In essence the student services team of the Division becomes the tool by which the academic staff's objectives are better achieved by their students, and the students' aim of succesful course completion and of sound learning of a discipline are facilitated.

The objective is not that of student retention alone, but of course where this does legitimately occur the College does gain as an organisation. Although individual students may well achieve something through an uncompleted course, the institution's surface efficiency is improved by retention. From a purely financial point of view (not the most important factor in a tertiary institution however) the mere retention of the equivalent of ten full-time students each year brings in funds which are well on the way to financing the team's activities. However, it is difficult to measure the human benefits of helping students (and academic staff) to achieve their goals.

FEEDBACK FOR CORRESPONDENCE STUDENTS

by Robert Trevethan

Determining what is appropriate feedback for correspondence students, for me at least, has not been an easy matter; given that I have had to put a considerable amount of thought into determining how feedback might be most effective I felt there were at least some things I could write when Dr Eastcott asked me if I would submit some of my ideas regarding feedback for this pamphlet.

I have been co-ordinating the two introductory psychology subjects in correspondence at RCAE for three years now. In each of these subjects I have required up to six submissions and have aimed for three sets of printed feedback material to be sent to students during each semester. These materials range in length from two to six pages.

To send more frequent and comprehensive feedback than this would, for me, lie somewhere between being difficult, inconsiderate, and irresponsible. This takes into consideration such things as my other commitments at College, the burden I might place on the printery and the packaging staff in External Studies and the sheer cost of frequently mailing material to students when large classes are involved.

Isolation

There are four main purposes that I try to make feedback material serve. The first purpose is that of breaking down the isolation that many correspondence students must feel. This is the main reason for my

trying to design subjects so that students are required to submit something that can be marked rapidly early in the semester. Even if the contribution towards the final grade of the piece submitted is only small this ensures that at least some early feedback is possible. I think this response from us may well serve the function of letting students know that they "belong". In addition to feedback being given early in the subject, I try to break down the isolation by having several paragraphs of introductory remarks at the beginning of each set of materials. This is really no more than a "chat" about such things as my general impressions about students' assignments, or sorting out problems that were not anticipated when the packages were written.

Information

For me the second purpose of feedback is to give students information about their own performance (as distinct from the performance of others) on a particular submission - information such as what was deficient in their own assignment and how improvement might be possible. I have found that where many students make the same kinds of error, and it would therefore be necessary to write the same comment on a large proportion of the assignments, it is more economical to include in the feedback materials a page or so of information on what model answers would look like, with notes at appropriate places in the students' assignments such as "see comment 2 on page 3 of the feedback material". This of course does not preclude writing other comments on the assignments themselves.

I realise that if we provide such things as model answers in one year and set the same assignments in subsequent years one major problem is bound to arise: there is a reasonable chance that some students will

have access to the feedback materials from previous semesters and will therefore have an unfair advantage over the other students. The most obvious solution to this problem is of course to set different assignments each time a subject is offered. This is not easily accomplished, but I think the effort on our part is worthwhile for the benefit to the students because they are forced to do their own thinking (without access to model answers) and are later provided with model answers so that they can see how their work might be improved.

Performance

The third purpose of feedback for me is to let students know how they are faring relative to other students in the class. I provide this information not out of any desire to generate competitiveness among students, but rather because I have found that they want it. Last year 87% of my students felt that feedback should reveal how they were performing relative to the others. I meet this desire in a number of ways. First, on each item required for assessment I provide details such as the range of scores obtained on that particular submission, the average of these scores, and their standard deviation. (I think most students understand what a range and average are; I explain how to interpret a standard deviation briefly in the first set of materials.) Second, in some sets of feedback material I tell students how they stand relative to their classmates on the basis of all the pieces submitted for assessment up to that point. Without the computer this would be a forbidding task, but a set of programs is available which provides this information with minimal effort. (Incidentally I would be quite happy to assist anyone who would like to begin using these programs.) Finally, in a set of feedback material

which is prepared at the end of semester I mention the percentages of students obtaining A's, P's and so on.

Evaluation

The fourth use I have made of feedback material has been to inform students of the results obtained on a subject evaluation questionnaire that they complete near the end of the semester. Since we have not been running residential schools in our introductory subjects I felt that the students would appreciate knowing their fellow students' reactions to various aspects of the subject such as the style of delivery, set texts, lack of a residential school, and so on.

I will conclude with two points. One is that I have no intention of arguing that what I am doing is what others should do; "horses for courses" applies to feedback too, and such things as class size, the level and nature of a subject, and a lecturer's personal style should determine the nature of feedback to some extent. The other point is that providing the type of feedback I have been talking about is possible largely because of the excellent service provided by our typists, people in External Studies and Computing, and especially those in the printery and in the packaging section of External Studies.